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ABSTRACT

Travel slides, which many teachers have from their own travels, can provide material for excellent language lessons of high interest, even at beginning levels. Slides of Africa were used to develop five teaching units easily adapted to several language levels. Each unit included questions and information about the slides with related reading and writing exercises: an African folktale with related questions; a dialogue based on a slide; and an African cultural history exercise with reading, questions, and an audio-motor activity. Selected groups of slides were also used for specific drill on, for example, prepositions or rejoinders. These lessons were used with teenage and adult students of beginning to advanced levels. The slides were a means of including interesting content on African geography, history, and culture; they also served as a bridge to get students to talk about their own cultures. The slides helped to create a relaxed learning environment for both teaching and allowing communication. Finally, the slides involved the students in what was being taught and stimulated them to originate their own utterances. Teachers should consider their own travel slides as a basis for developing valuable language lessons. (Author)

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Travel Slides: The Forgotten Medium in Teaching English as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

Travel slides, which many teachers have from their own travels, can provide material for excellent language lessons of high interest, even at beginning levels. Slides of Africa were used to develop five teaching units easily adapted to several language levels. Each unit included questions and information about the slides with related reading and writing exercises: an African folktale with related questions; a dialogue based on a slide; an African cultural history exercise with reading, questions, and an audio-motor activity. Selected groups of slides were also used for specific drill on, for example, prepositions or rejoinders. These lessons were used with teenage and adult students of beginning to advanced levels. The slides were a means of including interesting content on African geography, history, and culture; they also served as a bridge to get students to talk about their own cultures. The slides helped to create a relaxed learning environment for both teaching and allowing communication. Finally, the slides involved the students in what was being taught and stimulated them to originate their own utterances. Teachers should consider their own travel slides as a basis for developing valuable language lessons.

Teachers of English as a second language very often have at hand good visual materials on which to base language lessons. These need not be professionally prepared materials but can be, for example, one's own travel slides. Slides are an especially good way to bring into language lessons some geography, history, and culture--a view of another land. Slides can also be selected to present and practice a particular grammar point.

The literature on language teaching for the past ten years (1965-1975) includes surprisingly little on the use of visual materials outside of television. However, a few teachers and researchers in the fields of foreign and second language teaching have presented some useful reports.

Dean Obrecht attempted to test the comparative value of a rigidly specified, pattern oriented approach to learning a new language with an approach that emphasized, after adequate modeling, the origination of sentences by the student in response to visual stimuli. Obrecht (1971:27) believed that the latter approach comes "closer to tapping the normal human ability to abstract from slight and partial evidence the rules of grammar. This is thoroughly in accord with a generative approach to language...." He found that the freedom allowed the students in constructing their own sentences tended to increase their attention to the "'approved' solution which was given them after they created their own response." (1971:27) Obrecht speculated that in a theoretical sense the students "amended, completed, added or perhaps recalled" rules of their internal grammar. (1971:28) He concluded that a "language training program less tightly structured, less bound to pattern drill and rote repetition, making increased use of the

notion of training geared to the generation of 'original' utterances (with adequate offering of correct models) is superior." (1971:28)

John Tong (1971:4) tested the use of visual aids in teaching vocabulary and found that "the more intense the accompanying stimulus the better the vocabulary learning." He recognized the desirability of learning a language in a real-life setting and that visual material can aid in providing the setting.

L. R. Cole (1967:85) mentions various functions of the picture in language teaching. Representing real objects, events, and situations, "it sets speech in its proper context by providing an anchor for sound sequences; it aids memorization and can help recall by triggering off an associated response; it can provide a starting point for oral composition and even be used to practice substitution and transformation drills based on linguistic principles." (1967:85) Cole believes that the picture becomes a valuable tool when introduced at the appropriate stage of learning, that being "when students have already become acquainted with the basic structures and wish to consolidate them and use them in response to questions...." The picture becomes the device to elicit questions and answers, to reinforce "the meaningful context in which the already-learned structure functions." (1967:85)

Cole brings up a significant point about meaning in relation to pictures. Meaning should not be defined just in terms of what results from the association of sound with picture. "Meaning is also acquired by definition and association within the language itself, and meaning is something which grows from constant use and juxtaposition of linguistic structures." (1967:85)

Kreidler (1971:22) finds the value of visual aids similar to that suggested by Cole. "The visual aid...helps to create a situation or context which is outside the classroom walls." In addition visual aids "give reality to what verbally might be misunderstood." Kreidler also recognizes the flexibility of context-oriented pictures in that they can be introduced using any structure, directed toward any language level. She also suggests that the visual stimulus can be used to introduce or practice a dialogue. The use of pictures has an additional advantage in providing "examples of authentic language use in very realistic situations." (1971:34)

Richards (1966) used slides in his classroom not so much for their realistic context, but to provide an open setting for communication. Richards chose slides, not necessarily related in sequence or topic, for what he calls their ambiguity. That is, the picture included more than one idea or allowed more than one interpretation in, for example, relationships between people, setting, time of day, etc. The students could then speculate about and discuss possible interpretations of the picture. His motivation in using slides was to relax his students' inhibitions about saying only the right thing.

Newmark (1967:273) also found visual media, film specifically, an invaluable aid in getting adult students to relax their inhibitions, anxieties, and fears about speaking a new language. "It is necessary to go beyond verbal exhortations to relax, speak up, etc., and to create the conditions which will elicit the behavior desired of the students."

As these writers indicate, visual materials are useful in having students generate their own original utterances, in teaching vocabulary, in providing a meaningful and realistic context for language practice, and in creating a classroom environment conducive to language learning. Having appreciated these qualities of visual materials, I have developed language lessons based on slides. This project began as a means of including interesting content in lessons for students of English as a second language. The basis of the lessons was a series of slides of Africa taken during my travels there. Although the slides were not taken for the purpose of teaching, they have provided good material for language lessons.

My slides covered East and Central Africa and Egypt. I invented a character named Belinda who was to travel through Africa. I divided the journey through Africa into six sections, which gradually developed into six teaching units, each including several lessons.

Each unit included from fifteen to twenty-five slides using the following format. On day one of each unit I showed about fifteen slides. Along with the slides I used a world map for geographical terms. Each student was also given a blank map of Africa to label with information such as the names of countries, capitals, rivers, the Equator. The students were asked questions about each slide. Information about the pictures and Africa was fed in through questions and statements. For example, in a slide showing some boys playing soccer I would ask, "What is that boy doing?" "Do people in your country play soccer?" "Ask your friend if he plays soccer." The information and appropriate

language constructions were practiced in chain questions and by having students ask each other questions. The students were also given the opportunity to invent their own questions and statements.

After viewing the slides, the students were given a silent reading exercise based on the slides, with related oral and written questions. The questions were designed to develop a paragraph of controlled composition. (See appendix). The students were assigned part of the reading to prepare for a dictation the next day. For the units with twenty-five slides, the viewing was divided over two days, and the students were given two different reading and writing exercises.

On day two the students were given a dictation. Part of the time was spent on any new or troublesome grammar points. These were drilled with a contrast technique developed by Alexander Lipson (1971) or with a picture cue series on the blackboard. The students also learned a dialogue. For some of the dialogues an appropriate slide portraying the situation was projected while they worked on the dialogue.

On day three the students read a folktale about Africa that I had adapted to their language ability. The reading was followed by oral and written comprehension questions. (See appendix ~~IX~~). Selected grammar points were discussed and drilled. Sometimes parts of the story were used for dictation. In addition, the folktales lent themselves to discussions and/or writing by relating the ideas of the story to the students' own lives.

On day four the students read about an aspect of African cultural history and how that cultural contribution is used today. Then the students followed commands, along the lines of an audio-

motor activity (Kalivoda et al. 1971) to recreate a facsimile of the process, for example, to make a right angle as the ancient Egyptians did, or to hammer a nail with a rock, African style. (See Appendix). For less advanced students, the folktale was omitted, and the simpler cultural exercise was given more emphasis. For advanced students, to add additional information and challenge, newspaper articles about Africa were read and discussed.

I have used this format with two different groups of students. The first were teenage, advanced beginners, in a four-hour daily program; the second were adult, intermediate to advanced, in a two-hour daily program. With the first group it seemed helpful to show each set of slides twice on successive days. Viewing slides twice seems to be a maximum for effective use. (Mulholland 1973). As the teenagers were sometimes restless, the interesting content of the lessons was especially valuable. With both groups, but especially the second, the slides stimulated a variety of language practice. After my initial questions, I would have the students ask each other questions of their own making, based on the slides. The students worked hard to challenge each other. Sometimes students had their own information to contribute. In addition, the pictures were the basis of bridge questions to get students to talk about their own culture and country.

One of the most interesting responses from both groups was their spontaneous trying out of structures that they had learned recently in other parts of class work. This practice was exciting to see because the students were using newly or partly learned constructions in a natural way. They were responding to a visually presented situation in an appropriate way with their own new

language. For example, if we had been working on clauses of result or comparatives earlier in the week, a student might invent a sentence in which he tried to use the new construction. As teachers of English as a second language must sometimes rack their brains to contrive situations to practice structures, these spontaneous attempts were gratifying and were readily extended to practice for other members of the class as well.

Another kind of practice that came from selected slides was drill on prepositions, numbers, colors, verb tenses, etc. If a projector is at hand, slides can be selected for brief drills. For example, from the unit on Africa, I selected several slides for practice on wishing and hoping. In another instance in teaching rejoinders I used slides of my three children at the beach. With the slides the students could see the purpose in saying, "She is on the boat, and so is he." Without a realistic context the students had difficulty in understanding the usage of this kind of construction.

In using slides of Africa the world map was an essential adjunct, both for information and drills. In addition, I selected National Geographic magazines for their inclusion of articles on Africa. These were on hand in the room for students to borrow and browse through when they had finished other work. They were also useful for expanding and explaining a word or concept.

Evaluating the use of slides in teaching English as a second language involves several parameters. First, one might well question the use of slides of Africa in an English class in America. My initial motivation for using them was to add interest and content to language lessons. The latter was especially important as my

students had been recently displaced from high school in their own countries. An unexpected bonus having to do with cultural attitudes came from the slides. Because the pictures involved neither their new country nor their old, they provided neutral ground for ideas. Bridge questions could compare, for example, the climate and crops of East Africa with those of the students' countries, and sometimes incidentally the United States, without always having the direct comparison between their country and their sometimes inhospitable new home. This is, of course, not to say that one should avoid teaching American culture. I have also used slides of the United States to do just that. Rather, this look at a third country can be an oblique, objective approach to cultural awareness.

In his "Communication Techniques" Schumann (1972) has evaluated several aural-visual-structure techniques on the basis of how much they allow communication and how much they teach communication. My technique with slides probably teaches communication about 40 percent of the time and allows it 60 percent of the time, although it is difficult to say for the class as a whole where one begins and the other leaves off. Most of my questions designed to give and ask information are limited to structures the students have already encountered. Some of the students may not have mastered these structures so that the slides provide practice in a realistic context. New vocabulary items may be introduced in, for example, the noun or adjective slot of a familiar structure. When a new grammatical structure is needed, this is usually introduced separately from the slide viewing, but with related content, using the Lipson contrast technique or by using a picture cue series on the blackboard.

My use of slides allows and stimulates communication. In addition, the slides provide the chance to teach a student to say what he wants to say. For example, a slide may be of sisal production. A student who lives in a sisal-producing country may know a lot about sisal. His knowledge of English is not yet adequate to say what he knows about sisal, but he can be helped to say what he wants. In doing so he learns language that is meaningful and important to him. Because he is learning something he wants to know, he is attentive and responsive in the learning situation.

Finally, the slides do seem to allow something that I believe is valuable to efficient language learning--an interest and involvement in what is being presented and taught. This involvement is evident in the classroom. There is also a sometimes amusing indication of it when a student will spontaneously use the character Belinda (part of the slide sequence) and an idea appropriate to her to try out a new construction, even when the slides are not in sight.

Visual material is a valuable, possibly neglected, part of language teaching. Many teachers have interesting, useful visual material in their own collections--their travel slides, for example. These can be used to develop stimulating language lessons.

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